

The Church in Thyatira—the Tolerant Church, the Apostate Church

Revelation 2:18-29 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁸ "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like burnished bronze, says this:

¹⁹ 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith, and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. ²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. ²³ And I will kill her children with plague, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. ²⁴ But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. ²⁵ Nevertheless what you have, hold firmly until I come. ²⁶ The one who overcomes, and the one who keeps My deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations; ²⁷ and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are shattered, as I also have received authority from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Introduction

A recap of the last three Sundays:

We are midway through in our sermon series on Jesus' letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. So far, we have covered three congregations: the Church in Ephesus, the Church in Smyrna, and the Church in Pergamum. Through His letters, Christ commands us to defend the biblical truth against false teachings. He calls for repentance in the Church. Those who remain faithful to the Lord until death, Christ promises, will never taste the second death, which is the eternal fire, a.k.a. hell. Last week, we also learned that the Lord Jesus hates idol worship and sexual immorality among the believers.

This morning, we are going to listen to the Lord once again who wrote a letter to the Church in Thyatira. Let's begin with the background info on this city.

Background info:

Thyatira was the smallest city of the seven cities in Asia Minor mentioned in the Book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. It was an ancient city first established around 3,000 BC. It was located about 40 miles southeast of Pergamum. Under Roman occupation, Thyatira

became a successful commercial center, reaching its peak by the time this letter was written.

Thyatira was built as a fort to stop the invaders from the East. Thousands of soldiers were stationed there. It was teeming with soldiers. You can easily imagine any town in America where either army or naval base is. In order to sustain such massive military presence in Thyatira, certain businesses were developed and thrived such as stables, eateries, tannery, even coppersmith trade. The city had “*numerous trade guilds, including wool merchants, bakers, potters, tanners, and coppersmiths. Many of these guilds worshipped a particular deity and expected members to make sacrifices to it. Those who refused often struggled to find work—which proved complicated for Christians who left idolatry behind*” (<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/end-times/what-revelation-teach-about-church-at-thyatira.html>).

The Church in Thyatira

Paul and His mission team started a church there along with other churches. One of Paul’s first converts in the region was a woman named Lydia, who resided in Thyatira (Acts 16:14-15). She was in the textile business.

Content

Let us go over verse by verse in today’s text. In verse 18, Christ says to John,

¹⁸ “*And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: **The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like burnished bronze, says this:***”

Remember? Christ begins His letter with a greeting relevant to the congregation or the topic He is going to address in the letter. Here, He says, *I am the Son of God*. It reminded the audience of Apollo, *the son of Zeus*. In fact, in the city, there was a temple dedicated to Apollo, the son of Zeus. So, every time people visited the temple and worshiped there, they were accustomed to hearing that phrase. Christ declares, *Apollo is not the son of God. I am!* He also says that He has eyes are like a *flame of fire*, and feet like burnished *bronze*. It must have reminded the believers of the shop where coppersmith worked with burnished bronze. Christ is going to speak something about their trade and what’s happening in the guild. Verse 19.

¹⁹ “*I **know your deeds, and your love and faith, and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.***”

It is always great to hear a compliment from the Lord, isn't it? Here, the Lord acknowledges their deeds of love and faith, service, and perseverance during hardship. He also mentions that their deeds of late are greater than at first. In other words, the congregation has been doing well in love, faith, service, and perseverance during persecution. So far so good. Then comes His admonishment in verse 20.

²⁰ *But I have **this against you**, that you tolerate the woman **Jezebel**, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and **leads My bond-servants astray** so that they **commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols**.*

I have this against you: Christ had one thing against the Church in Thyatira. What was the problem? The congregation tolerated a false teacher, Jezebel, who seduced Christ's servants to commit 'sexual immorality' and to 'eat things sacrificed to idols.' About these two topics, I have already spoken before, so I won't repeat it here, but these two practices negatively affected the believers in other congregations as well.

Jezebel: We need to know who Jezebel is here. Was it the actual name of the false prophetess? It could be. Or, in my opinion, Christ uses the name of 'Jezebel' as a metaphor. In the Old Testament, Jezebel was a real queen, the wife of King Ahab in the kingdom of Israel in the 9th century BC. She was a foreigner. When Ahab married her, she brought her own religion, Baal and Asherah, and corrupted her husband's heart and spread the worshiping of Baal in the whole land (1 Kings 16:30-31). She killed off many of the LORD's prophets (1 Kings 18:4), filled the land with the prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 18:19), and did what was evil before the LORD: out of greed, she murdered Naboth and stole his vineyard next to the palace (1 Kings 21:15). She was so evil that the LORD said: 'Dogs will devour **Jezebel**' (1 Kings 21:23). That prophecy was fulfilled when Jehu revolted and killed King Joram, the grandson of Ahab.

As Jehu approached the palace to take over the kingdom, the eunuchs, looking down from the palace window, joining the new king, threw Jezebel down from the window "and some of her blood spattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot" (2 Kings 9:30-33). No one buried her (2 Kings 9:10). The LORD avenged the blood of the prophets, and the blood of all the Lord's servants that was shed by **Jezebel** (2 Kings 9:7). That was Jezebel. Her sin was to introduce idolatry in the land and brought much grief and hardship to the people of God.

Back to the Church in Thyatira. One commentator says this way: the false prophetess Jezebel said to the congregation, '*Don't you want to keep your job? Then, compromise. You don't have to be separated from the world. It is OK to follow the world*' (Rick Renner). Accordingly, some believers participated in sexually immoral behavior in their guild rituals, and ate meat sacrificed to idols, which was considered bowing down to the idols. They might have kept their job after all, but a grave sin was committed against Christ.

The same Jesus gives today's Church an ample warning that false teaching misleads God's chosen ones, therefore, it should never be allowed "to infiltrate and infect the body of believers" (Ibid.). Let's move on. Verse 21.

²¹ *I gave her time to repent, and she **does not want** to repent of her sexual immorality.*

God is gracious even to the false prophets and teachers and gives them time to repent. Not all of them repent, though. In our text, Jezebel refuses to repent of the sin of seducing God's people with idol worship and sexual immorality. Verse 22, Christ continues.

²² *Behold, I will throw her on a bed of **sickness**, and those who commit adultery with her into great **tribulation**, **unless** they repent of her deeds.*

Now, Christ is going to bring Jezebel and her followers 'sickness' and 'great tribulation,' unless they repent of her deeds—**unless** they stop practicing sexual immorality and stop participating in idol worship. In the same way, Christ calls today those who've been led astray by false teachings or caught in sin to repent. Verse 23.

²³ *And I will kill her children with plague, and all the churches will know that I am He who **searches the minds and hearts**; and I will give to each one of you **according to your deeds**.*

Hear what Christ says: I will destroy the followers of false teaching with plague. The result of following false prophet is plague and destruction. Christ also declares: all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. Did you know that too? Our Lord searches our hearts and minds. He knows deep and secret things in our lives. He also says, *I will give to each one of you according to your deeds*. Christ holds us accountable for our deeds and thoughts. So will He all the churches for their deeds. Verses 24 and 25,

²⁴ *But I say to you, **the rest** who are in Thyatira, **who do not hold this teaching**, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place **no other burden** on you. ²⁵ Nevertheless what you have, **hold firmly** until I come.*

Two groups in the Church at Thyatira. One group followed Jezebel's teaching. The other group didn't. Christ is speaking to the other group who did not hold the teaching of Jezebel. *I will place no other burden*. He encourages them to stay the course and hold firmly to what they have until He comes. Verses 26 through 28.

²⁶ *The one who overcomes, and the one who keeps My deeds **until the end**, I will give him **authority over the nations**; ²⁷ and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are shattered, as I also have received authority from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him **the morning star**.*

To those who faithfully keep Christ's words and deeds until the end, Christ promises to give 'authority over the nations.' They will rule over nations with Christ in God's Kingdom.

See also Matthew 19:28: ²⁸ *And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration (kc-in the next world) when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* Paul also wrote: ² *Or do you not know that the **Lord's people will judge the world?** ...* ³ *Do you not know that **we will judge angels?*** (1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

What about 'the morning star?' Christ Himself is the bright Morning Star: **"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you of these things for the churches. I *am* the root and the descendant of David, **the bright morning star**"** (Revelation 22:16). So, Christ offers Himself to those who overcome and keep His words and deeds until the end. What more can we ask for?! Christ is all we want and need! In verse 29, Christ concludes,

²⁹ ***The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***'

Once again, Christ leaves it up to us. The choice is yours. Listen, discern, and decide wisely according to Christ's commands.

Conclusion

Christ's warning to the church of Thyatira is still relevant to the believers today. In the first century, slanders, persecution, sexual immorality, and false doctrines were everywhere within and without to destroy the Church of God. The Church in Thyatira was compromising with the world that was encouraged by false teachings. This deeply troubled Christ. So, He commands true believers to "hold fast" to His word of truth. Unity, love, and compassion are essential in the Church; however, Christ says, not at the expense of truth. If we do so, in the end, *"we may show neither compassion for the individual nor regard for the church's health and well-being."* (Ibid.).

So, listen to Christ's warning one more time. Stay away from false teachings and hold onto the Word of God the truth in times of compromise and confusion. Christ is compassionate with our shortcomings and faults, but on certain things He shows no tolerance. One of them is idolatry. The other is sexual immorality. The third one is false doctrine. Shun them all, Christ says. Let those who have ears, let them hear. Amen.